

ISSUES AND SERVICES FOR FY 2007

The Department completed its third full year in pursuit of national accreditation through the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies (CALEA). It is anticipated that accreditation will be awarded this fiscal year. The voluntary program is a joint effort between CALEA, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), the National Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE), the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA) and the Police Executive Research Forum (PERF).

CALEA was formed in 1979 to establish a body of standards designed to (1) increase law enforcement agency capabilities to prevent and control crime; (2) increase agency effectiveness and efficiency in the delivery of law enforcement services; (3) increase cooperation and coordination with other law enforcement agencies and other agencies of the criminal justice system; and (4) increase citizen and employee confidence in the goals, objectives, policies and practices of the agency.

CALEA sets forth 446 standards organized into 38 topic areas. The standards reflect the best professional requirements and practices for a law enforcement agency. The standards' requirements provide a description of what must be accomplished by the applicant agency but allows the agency latitude in determining how to achieve compliance with each standard. Fewer than 15% of law enforcement agencies nationwide have reached this professional goal. Thanks to the team effort of all employees, the Department will achieve this long-sought recognition.

A significant challenge to the Department is the recruitment and selection of well-qualified employees. Competition for prospective police candidates is fierce. While our overall benefit package is competitive, the starting salary for police officers has fallen below average for most jurisdictions our size. Most prospective employees are lured by the short term reward of higher salaries more so than the long-term overall benefit package. Steps to bring the salary into line are necessary, which would lead to greater recruiting numbers.

The recruitment challenge is exacerbated by the retirement bubble facing the Department. Within five years, approximately 40% of the police officers will reach retirement age. Long range planning is in progress to efficiently handle the transition. One solution to the recruitment dilemma is to re-instate the cadet program. The cadet program identifies young men and women between the ages of 18 – 21 who are desirous of a career in law enforcement. Candidates undergo the same selection process as that of a police officer. The cadets are assigned to Administrative Services to perform various functions in all aspects of law enforcement outside of making actual arrests. The program was very successful leading to the hiring of several people who have spent their careers with the Department. Tight financial restraints caused the program to cease although it is still part of the Departmental structure.

Under the direction of MPO Kelly Lawson and MPO Jonathan Lowndes, a Police Explorer Program is being developed to provide youth between the ages of 14 to 21 with an opportunity to immerse themselves in the law enforcement field. Under the auspices of the Boy Scouts of America, the Explorer Program develops self-reliance and leadership skills in youths who may be interested in becoming officers in the future. Similar to the cadet program, although unpaid and designed to target a wider and much younger group of teens, this program could be fertile ground for recruitment in years to come.

The personnel transition within the Department coincides with the advent of development in Greenbelt West. Greenbelt Station and the redevelopment of Springhill Lake will bring change to police service in those areas. The Department, and to a greater extent, City services in their entirety, are poised to undergo a metamorphosis unlike any before.

To meet that challenge, the Department will need a larger police presence. Six additional officers are planned to coincide with the development in Greenbelt West. However, demands for police service extend to other parts of the City. Calls for services are not likely to remain stagnant or decrease in Greenbelt East or Historic Greenbelt.

Adding officers to the Department does not necessarily require hiring sworn police personnel. Several positions within the Department held by officers could be effectively administered by civilians. Contemporary law enforcement agencies have replaced the Administrative Services Commander, Administrative Sergeant, Accreditation Manager, Administrative Corporal, Evidence Technician and Crime Prevention/Public Information Officer positions with civilians. Doing so in our agency would redeploy six officers in more traditional patrol or investigative functions. The transition would occur over time as incumbents retire or otherwise separate from service. A side benefit would maintain the talent of some of incumbent personnel nearing retirement. It is important to note that the functions provided by these individuals are vital to the success of the Department. It is not being suggested that they be eliminated, however they could be filled by civilians for a lesser cost.

The Law Enforcement Regional Communications and Data Center Project, a joint undertaking with the cities of Greenbelt, Hyattsville, Mount Rainier and towns of Bladensburg and Riverdale Park has maintained steady, albeit slow progress. Records management has seen the most growth and development with the placement of software that allows information sharing primarily between Greenbelt and Hyattsville. Data lines have been established between all agencies; however conversion data is spotty in the other jurisdictions.

It has become apparent that computer aided dispatching between all agencies will be years out due to its significant cost. Grants are being sought at every opportunity, with the likelihood of funding coming under the auspices of Homeland Security at the federal or state level. In the meantime, it would be prudent for the City to seek individual capability of computer aided dispatching with the understanding that the technology would be compatible with whatever future system the regional center would employ. Discussions have taken place with the current provider of the software being used for our shared records management system. Vendors have been identified to provide the necessary services at an estimated cost of \$120,000.

Our current practice of handwriting calls for service and dispatching without the aid of computer assistance is 1950's technology. Although the concepts of a regional dispatching center are highly commendable and still a priority, it is folly to continue our current methods. Service and efficiency is being sacrificed while we wait for the regional center. Proceeding with our own computer aided dispatch in accordance with the technical direction of Mitrttek, the company providing technical management of the development of the regional center, would provide a logical stepping stone to the realization of the center while providing a higher degree of public service to the community.

This past year, Greenbelt Fraternal Order of Police Lodge #32, Inc. (FOP) was provided with collective bargaining rights as a result of a voter referendum. At this writing, a labor code is being developed to provide for the mechanism to enter into negotiations. Beginning with next year's budget, an additional level of preparation will be necessary for negotiations between the FOP and the City to formulate the budget. What impact that will have on staff time and resources has yet to be determined although the experience so far indicates that it could be significant.